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ABSTRACT

This paper, which focuses on community college faculty productivity, is part of a series published by the Center for Community College Policy, designed to support state and local policymakers, as well as educational leaders who are interested in policy issues related to the two-year postsecondary sector. The day-to-day interaction of faculty and students inside and outside of the classroom represents one of the most significant resources a community college provides for its students. With a current focus on accountability, the public continues to question how tax dollars translate to educational outcomes that benefit the community. Increasingly, community colleges have come to rely on part-time faculty to control costs and meet demands for courses. In 1993, part-time faculty made up 65% of the total number of community college faculty members nationwide. Some suggest that the only difference between part-time and full-time faculty is the fact that the later generate more credit hours. The question then revolves around the overall productivity of full-time faculty. The paper offers several suggestions for promoting faculty vitality and improving student learning, including: (1) facilitate specialized training for faculty members seeking promotion to the highest ranks; and (2) facilitate a rigorous, nonuniversity-based certification program that will give visible recognition to exceptional community college teachers. (AF)

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# ENHANCING FACULTY PRODUCTIVITY: A STATE PERSPECTIVE

by James Palmer

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## INTRODUCTION

Community college faculties represent a significant state investment in educational opportunity. Their productivity lies not just in how many students they teach but also in the extent to which their work offers students a quality learning experience, responds to changing demands for education and furthers state higher education goals (such as workforce development, efficient student transfer from two-year to four-year colleges or the sharing of resources among institutions). It is largely through the faculty—those who have day-to-day contact with students—that state interests in community college systems are realized or thwarted.

Policymakers who would address faculty productivity in this broad sense walk a fine line between the legitimate exercise of authority and harmful micromanagement. Decisions about the best use of individual faculty members are necessarily an internal college matter. Yet carefully developed guidelines or incentives focusing on the collective product of the community college professoriate statewide rather than the productivity of individual teachers can be developed. This paper cites examples, focusing on state responses to the growth of part-time instructors and — in the wake of this growth — the public's legitimate questioning of what it receives for its investment in the remaining full-time faculty.

## BACKGROUND

Community colleges (like four-year colleges and universities) operate in familiar yet increasingly outmoded ways. Faculty members are paid to teach classes that are offered over a set period of time (such as a 15-week semester) at specified locations (usually an assigned room on a college campus). Their workload is usually measured in terms of the number of students taught, the number of classes taught and the number of credit hours generated (a three-semester-hour class with 25 students generates 75 semester hours).

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Because community college faculty members have few research obligations, their teaching workload is high compared to four-year colleges and universities, at least in terms of credit-hour production and the number of courses taught; in addition, they devote more of their time to teaching than do their counterparts in other postsecondary sectors (see Table 1). But the nature of the college enterprise is changing and with it the assumption that individual teaching loads represent adequate measures of faculty work. There are at least three reasons for this:

- **The expansion of the community college into job training and economic development roles (in addition to traditional college instruction) has placed a premium on rapid college responsiveness to a changing economy.** Large full-time faculties teaching courses in traditional 15-week formats may hinder the ability of colleges to change course offerings as needed. The trend is toward a part-time professoriate augmented by new, entrepreneurial college units that provide instruction on demand for specific purposes within flexible time frames.
- **Computer and communication technologies potentially allow large numbers of students to complete courses at home and within their own timeframes.** This may change the nature of faculty work, reducing the number of faculty members needed per campus (as the importance of the classroom diminishes) and requiring those who remain to become facilitators of multiple approaches to instruction (of which classroom teaching is only one).
- **The privileged status faculty members enjoy as autonomous professionals who are free to act with strong tenure protections has become less sustainable.** Public demands for information on student outcomes necessarily increase pressure on the faculty to account for its work. This is especially true as professional workers in other industries encounter the uncertainties of "downsizing" within their own careers and ask why college teachers should be shielded from the pressure of market forces.

These trends suggest a need to rethink faculty work, moving from a concern for time spent on the job to a concern for the contributions faculty members make and for the ways states can enhance the capacity of the faculty to make those

**Table 1**
**Workload Measures of Full-Time Faculty Members Teaching Undergraduate Courses Only in Various Types of Public Colleges and Universities, Fall 1992**

| | | Workload Measures, Fall 1992 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Type of Public College or University | Number of Classes Taught (Average) | Total Number of Students Taught (Average) | Total Student Credit Hours Generated (Average) | Percent of Time Actually Spent Teaching (Average) |
| Public Two-Year Colleges | 4.53 | 103 | 375 | 75% |
| Public Comprehensive Colleges | 3.45 | 103 | 338 | 68% |
| Public Ph.D. – Granting Universities | 3.03 | 102 | 333 | 64% |
| Public Research Universities | 2.37 | 105 | 344 | 57% |

*Source: Fall 1992 National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty, U.S. Department of Education. The data were derived from the department's online data-analysis system (www.pedar-das.org), February 9, 1998. The data apply only to full-time faculty members at public institutions who indicated that teaching was their primary responsibility in fall 1992 and who taught undergraduate courses only.*

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## Table 2
### Potential Benefits and Costs of the Part-Time Faculty

| Benefits | Costs |
|---|---|
| Lower salaries, producing a lower cost per credit hour of instruction | The administrative costs of hiring part-timers, orienting them to their work, scheduling their classes and monitoring their teaching performance. |
| No claims on long-term employment, providing the college with greater capacity to change | As the part-time faculty grows and the full-time faculty shrinks, students may find it more difficult to conveniently meet with academic advisors. In addition, the capacity of the full-time faculty to interact with students may be further diminished to the extent that full-timers must orient and monitor the work of their part-time colleagues. |
| Often bring "real world" experience to the classroom (as in the case of a newspaper editor teaching a journalism course) | |
| Provide a feasible way of teaching low-demand classes with enrollments that would not justify hiring a full-time faculty member. | |

contributions. To the extent that the changing education environment is driven by statewide priorities (such as economic development or the sharing of instructional resources across colleges), faculty claims to "own" the curricula within their own institutions will have to give way, at least partially, to statewide coordination.

## Part-Time Faculty as a State Resource

Like other enterprises, community colleges have increasingly relied on a part-time, contingent workforce to maintain productivity while controlling costs. Part-time faculty members, particularly in vocational areas, also bring real-world experience to the classroom. (See Table 2.) In the fall of 1993, part-timers made up approximately 65% of the total number of community college faculty members nationwide, up from 54% in 1987. (In contrast, only 34% of the faculty at public four-year colleges and universities were hired on a part-time basis in the fall of 1993.)

Though there are variations by discipline and age, approximately half of the part-time faculty at the nation's community colleges take their jobs because they prefer part-time employment; the remaining half take their jobs because full-time employment is unavailable (see Table 3 on page 5).

State policies sometimes impose specific ratios of full-time to part-time faculty, making the implicit assumption that the employment of part-timers is, at some point, detrimental to the student's learning experience. For example, the California Administrative Code uses funding incentives to maintain a target 75%:25% ratio of credit hours produced (respectively) by the full-time faculty versus the part-time faculty. Yet research to date offers little evidence either way about the comparative teaching effectiveness of full-time and part-time faculty members. What can be said with confidence is that faculty hiring, training and evaluation are often less rigorous for part-timers than for full-timers. Attention to these matters will do more to protect the state's interest in assuring citizens a quality educational experience than imposing questionable limitations on the number of part-timers who are hired.

The most common approach is to stipulate that part-time faculty members must have

the same academic credentials required of full-time faculty members. Beyond the specification of minimum credentials, however, at least three policy options have been employed.

- **Issue general guidelines for the effective employment and use of part-time faculty.** For example, Florida's State Board of Community Colleges has developed guidelines that represent "sound educational practices" regarding the use of part-time faculty. Among the 14 guidelines are stipulations that colleges should (a) maintain a pool of qualified part-time instructors so that teachers are not hired on a last-minute basis with inadequate time to prepare for the first class meeting; (b) provide part-time faculty members with adequate information on what is expected of them and with professional development opportunities that will enhance their teaching skills; and (c) assign full-time faculty members to serve as mentors for their part-time colleagues. The board recognizes local college authority, but expects each community college district to develop hiring practices that conform to these 14 guidelines.

- **Describe and publicize "best practices" in the use of part-time faculty.** The Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), for example, draws on reports it receives from individual community colleges to publicize innovative work with part-time faculty. Publicity as a form of policy leverage is especially important in states that have weak regulatory authority over the community college system.

- **Use policy leverage to encourage thoughtful analysis of what full-time/part-time mix best serves students.** Rather than specifying an arbitrary ratio, states can require or encourage colleges to document and justify their full-time/part-time ratios within specific programs. For example, college undergraduate education review reports submitted to the IBHE include assessments of how the teaching/learning environment affects student achievement; the mix of part-timers and full-timers teaching general education courses is considered part of that environment. The colleges are asked to document how their part-time faculty augments student learning either by bringing special expertise to the classroom or allowing the college to provide a flexible response to community learning needs. This type of analysis maintains a focus on what's best for the student, not simply on administrative concerns for cost containment or faculty concerns for job security.

These options assume that colleges will contract with individuals to provide instructional services that complement the work of the full-time faculty. But "outsourcing" parts of the curriculum to government agencies, school systems, private firms or other colleges may be a more efficient means of securing instructional expertise. Policies that provide colleges the freedom to contract with outside agencies for instruction (or to contract with other colleges to provide instruction) encourage these efficiencies and decrease response time to changing educational demands within their service districts.

## Setting Expectations for the Full-Time Faculty

The growing use of part-timers raises an important question: What do state community college systems gain through full-time faculty that it cannot obtain from part-timers? To the extent that faculty members — full-time or part-time —

## Table 3
### Percentage of Part-Time Community College Faculty Members Who Indicate They Took a Part-Time Job Because Full-Time Work Was Unavailable, By Teaching Discipline and Age

| | Part-time because full-time work unavailable? | |
|---|---|---|
| | Yes (%) | No (%) |
| **All Part-Time Faculty** | 47.81 | 52.19 |
| **Part-Time Faculty by Selected Disciplines:** | | |
| Business | 38.15 | 61.85 |
| Communications | 62.66 | 37.34 |
| Teacher education | 47.32 | 52.68 |
| Other education | 48.51 | 51.49 |
| Engineering | 30.98 | 69.02 |
| Fine arts | 71.16 | 28.84 |
| Nursing | 29.63 | 70.37 |
| Other health sciences | 31.4 | 68.6 |
| English and literature | 59.05 | 40.95 |
| Foreign languages | 58.69 | 41.31 |
| History | 75.35 | 24.65 |
| Philosophy and religion | 52.34 | 47.66 |
| Law | 32.26 | 67.74 |
| Biological sciences | 75.35 | 24.65 |
| Physical sciences | 40.71 | 59.29 |
| Mathematics and statistics | 48.3 | 51.7 |
| Computer sciences | 29.95 | 70.05 |
| Psychology | 54.91 | 45.09 |
| Sociology | 43.21 | 56.79 |
| Other social sciences | 44.92 | 55.08 |
| Occupation programs | 39.74 | 60.26 |
| All other programs | 42.52 | 57.48 |
| **Part-Time Faculty, By Age** | | |
| Under 35 | 55.93 | 44.07 |
| 35-44 | 47.29 | 52.71 |
| 45-54 | 51.55 | 48.45 |
| 55-64 | 42.7 | 57.3 |
| 65 or older | 22.66 | 77.34 |

*Source: Fall 1992 National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty, U. S. Department of Education. The data were derived from the department's online data-analysis system (www.pedar-das.org), February 9, 1998.*

simply teach classes behind closed doors, the full-timers do the same work as part-timers; the only ostensible difference is that the former generate more credit hours than the latter.

This situation is perpetuated by state policies that focus narrowly on workload expectations, stipulating a minimum number of hours full-time faculty members must devote to instruction or consultation with students, requiring full-time faculty members to participate in committee work within the college, or setting limitations on the type and extent of outside employment that they may engage in. At best, these policies serve the practical function of assuring that full-time faculty members teach considerably more than part-time instructors, contribute to college work outside of the classroom and devote their full energies to their jobs. But the end result may be reduced local flexibility in the use of full-time faculty and a time-on-the-job mentality that does little to assure a quality instructional experience for students.


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### The Illinois Articulation Initiative: Easing Student Transfer Between Colleges

Faculty experience and talents can be tapped outside of the classroom. Illinois' Articulation Initiative is an example. Begun in 1993 by the Illinois Board of Higher Education and two other state organizations, it has involved hundreds of faculty members from both two-year and four-year colleges in the development of model lower-division curricula, both for general education and for specific undergraduate majors. A key assumption is that students will be able to transfer between colleges with minimal credit loss to the extent that the faculties at those colleges have a common understanding of academic standards and degree requirements.

The first product of the initiative, a lower-division general education module, was created in 1994. It defines the purpose of general education, specifies a 37-41 semester-hour sequence of courses in five areas (communications, mathematics, humanities and fine arts, social and behavioral sciences, and physical and life sciences), and delineates the competencies that students are to demonstrate in each. Additional modules have been or are in the process of being developed, specifying the "courses [that are] essential for community and junior college students to complete prior to transferring to a particular major in order to be on par with others in that major."

More useful policies treat the full-time faculty as a statewide instructional resource that can be strategically employed to further state ends. Examples include the following:

- **Regulations that tie employment to program demand.** For example, some state policies stipulate that the initial or continued employment of full-time faculty members will be contingent upon sufficient student demand. This ensures that full-time salaries and benefits will not be paid to instructors teaching only a small number of students or courses. It may also encourage colleges to view faculty hiring from a strategic standpoint, developing a faculty according to a defined market rather than trying to be all things to all people within a specific service region.

- **Encouraging the use of distance learning technologies as a means of sharing faculty expertise across institutions.** Careful, targeted and coordinated use of distance learning technologies can help make efficient use of faculty talents, especially in use of distance-learning. The California Education Code (Section 66940), for example, requires the California Postsecondary Education Commission to develop a policy statement on distance learning that (a) enhances the curricula at rural community colleges whose enrollments might not support a full range of college-level courses and (b) allows colleges to "receive varied types of supplementary educational programs; conduct exchanges with business, industry, and government; participate in live lectures and conferences on special topics; and increase cooperation and communication among educational institutions."

- **Involving full-time faculty members in state education improvement initiatives.** States can harness the experience and expertise of full-time community college teachers, involving them in important work outside of the classroom. An example is the Illinois Articulation Initiative (see above left).

## The Missing Link: Student Learning as Productivity Measure

A key challenge in the future is to break free of the shop-floor mentality that ties accountability to time on the job. The public's best interest ultimately lies in policies that help transform the community college faculty (both part-time and full-time) from a group of individuals hired to teach courses, to a professional collective that studies teaching, takes responsibility for student achievement and contributes its expertise to ongoing education reform. This ideally means that tenure and promotion should be tied to documented student learning.

It is here that state-level policymakers run the greatest risk of intruding on local administrative prerogatives and running aground on the stipulations of union contracts. Nonetheless, states can communicate the expectation that faculty productivity will be tied to student learning without micromanaging the faculty evaluation process at the college level. For example, they can publicize best practices in the evaluation of teaching outcomes (such as the compilation of teaching portfolios) or subsidize conferences that help faculty members understand ways of measuring and documenting student learning. Other policy options might include the following:

- **Facilitate specialized pedagogical training for faculty members seeking promotion to the highest ranks (such as full professor).** For example, promotion could be contingent on completion of a specialized graduate program focusing on teaching a discipline rather than on basic research within the discipline. George Mason University's doctor of arts program in community college education is an example. Its students include aspiring or experienced community college teachers who complete courses in pedagogy, doctoral-level classes in their teaching disciplines and a teaching internship. In lieu of a dissertation, the students complete a field-based doctoral project investigating a pedagogical problem within their disciplines.
- **Facilitate a rigorous, nonuniversity-based certification program that will give visible recognition to exceptional community college teachers.** The certification program developed for school teachers by NBPTS (see above) may serve as an example. Teachers seeking NBPTS certification spend approximately 120 hours over the course of a school year compiling a portfolio that provides evidence of their teaching effectiveness.

### Recognizing and Encouraging Outstanding Teaching

State and college policies specify minimum requirements for the employment of faculty and for faculty promotion. Most of those requirements rest on educational credentials. Usually, new faculty members must have a master's degree, and promotion requires additional, post-master's coursework.

But additional steps might be taken to tie employment and promotion to teaching effectiveness. The work of the nonprofit National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) offers a potential model. Its voluntary certification process allows accomplished teachers in a variety of disciplines to demonstrate their competency against specific standards of what teachers should know and be able to do. The certification process takes several months, requiring applicants to submit extensive teaching portfolios and to successfully complete rigorous assessment exercises.

States might adopt such a process for community college faculty members, applying the same level of oversight to them as is applied to the competency of physicians, architects and other professionals. As the NBPTS experience suggests, faculty involvement in the development of specific standards for teaching excellence will be important. Additional information on NBPTS can be found at www.nbpts.org.

Finance must be a final consideration. As long as state funding for community colleges remains tied to enrollment, a shift in emphasis from credit-hour production to instructional effectiveness is unlikely. Enrollment-based funding mechanisms generate a powerful incentive to relate faculty work to the number of students taught. Alternative arrangements that offer fiscal incentives for student outcomes (such as student job obtainment or successful baccalaureate degree completion for those who transfer to four-year colleges) may be needed.

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